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A NEEDLESS ENCOUNTER.



FOR want of a nearer approach to the right title, let the above suffice to give some sort of semblance to a beginning of what cannot pass as a literary article, nor yet a serious attempt at a critique.

The subject does not justify the venture even if one were in a mood to be solemnly in earnest. D'Israeli, sometimes called Beaconsfield, reviewed or interviewed at this time of his departed glory! Who would think of such a thing? Yet d'Israeli it is: not the astute, clever, and wonderfully successful statesman—not d'Israeli the Jew or Christian (?) nor even d'Israeli the Orientalist rich and very rich in luxurious fancies of all kinds; but the man who in spite of his political, shrewd and practical lookout for a good place for himself has woven together such fancies—has heaped such mountains of rich things—all in fancy to be sure, that no “Arabian Night” or day dreamer need expect to rank above him, is the man who of late, and very late it is, has been accidentally as it were thrown (save the mark) in my way. In other words one of his queerest books, one of his most absurd, has been of late helping me to kill some pretty heavy time. And “Tancredi,” d'Israeli's Tancredi (not Tasso's), is my latest study (?) and Lothair for the second time.

Whenever I could get ashore from my Roman galleys and Eastern gold-prowed vessels of many oars, to while away an hour at Corfu, Malta, Joppa, Beyrout or Ancient Tyre, I ran to the bowery shades and chatted for a while with “Lothair” and “Tancred.” I have just read both.

Well—what about “Lothair?” I have no time to go into details, but I think it the best of Disraeli's novels. It is a novel, and nothing else. A great moral, or rather a great chain of morals may be drawn from it. However they are not the same as the author would fain impart. Nor yet are they the reverse—I may say they are the converse. Nor yet that! I don't know how to express my idea. The great moral he draws from his work is the same I would draw from it, but I would apply it differently. His Catholic ideas are splendid as far as they go—but what a short way they go! His Protestant ideas more or less just—his Hebrew ideas not bad, if we apply them to Ancient Judaism—very perverse when connected with the history of the chosen people since the days of Christ. Some other time we will chat over Lothair. There is much in it I would like to speak about. But for the present let me turn to “Tancred or the New Crusade.”

It is no novel at all! Firstly, too didactic from end to end—secondly, there is no dramatic incident—thirdly, characters (except the hero) are faintly drawn—fourthly, the fate of the hero is left untold and the whole story is unfinished. It is in six books. Numbers one and two have nothing to do with the rest. Fifthly, it begins with a lot of London high life, etc., and runs on for two books in that way,—the next four books are all about the East. No connecting link whatsoever. Since he made six books, I'll add a sixthly to my remarks: he scatters his characters along the road and neither tells us where they have gone to, why they were invented, what they have to do with the main thread of the story, nor, in fact, anything